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## “We’re moving on up”: Creating a schoolwide literacy effort in an urban high school

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Here is an example of how professional development measures and an integrated approach to literacy positively affected one urban high school.

“We’re moving on up and reaching higher” were the words that the principal used to open the school year at Tubman High School (pseudonym) in San Diego, California. The student population at Tubman mirrors that of many urban schools in the United States: 100% qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch, 46% are English language learners, 54% are Latino, 21% are African American, 20% are Asian/Filipino, and 4% are white. Two years ago, this high school was one of the lowest performing high schools in the county and state.

However, over the past 2 years the students at Tubman have come to meet the accountability targets established by the California Department of Education—a feat that has not been accomplished in more than 15 years. In the most recent school year, reading scores increased by 12% overall on the statewide achievement test, and the average reader at Tubman improved from a grade level equivalent of 4.3 years to 5.4 years on the Gates-MacGinitie test. This is quite a gain; historically, students at Tubman and other inner city high schools improve their reading by half a year for every year they are in school. Tubman students more than doubled the performance of their historical peers and their peers in other district high schools.

Literacy achievement among adolescents and young adults has become a priority (e.g., Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999). Too many young adults enter the workplace or college under-prepared for the literacy-related tasks required of them (Hull, 1998;

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Martin, 1998; Pitts, White, & Harrison, 1999). Despite fewer resources directed toward this issue and less funding for adolescent literacy research, the needs are clear—urban youth are not performing as well as they could and should be (North Central Regional Educational Lab, 1998). This article focuses on the increases in student achievement, and the factors associated with those increases, at one urban high school.

## **Why the changes in student achievement at Tubman?**

Why did reading achievement improve at the school? To what do teachers attribute these changes? Are these changes replicable by other urban high schools? What plans are in place to continue this positive development? These questions became the core of a series of focus group meetings with the teachers and administrators at Tubman. Over 2 months, a series of nine focus group meetings were held. A total of 54 teachers participated in the focus groups. In addition, 10 teachers were randomly selected for classroom observations. Each of these teachers was observed on three different unannounced occasions. (See Sidebar on p. 98 for a detailed discussion of the methodology used.) Three schoolwide initiatives were identified as the reason for the changes in student reading scores. Two additional initiatives were identified as necessary components to continue the trend. Each of these initiatives is discussed with examples given by the teachers. In addition, I provide some recommendations for other urban high schools wishing to improve student achievement.

## **Component 1: Focused and accountable professional development**

The most obvious explanation for the improvement in reading achievement among the students at Tubman High School was the focused staff development. For each of the past 2 years, the staff development committee identified specific instructional strategies that teachers were expected to use. These strategies were communicated to the teachers at the back-to-school inservices. In addition, monthly meetings were held to allow teachers to discuss the implementation of the selected instructional strate-

gies. The meetings were held during the school day to ensure participation by all faculty members rather than by just a few volunteers who could attend after-school sessions. The staff development committee was careful to note that teachers could select from the menu of strategies depending on the unit of study, but that students in the school must come to know the strategies through repeated application across the subject matter.

The specific instructional strategies selected by the staff development committee were writing to learn, K-W-L (what I know, what I want to learn, what I have learned) charts, concept mapping, reciprocal teaching, vocabulary instruction, structured notetaking, and read-alouds. Each of these instructional practices was defined, and examples were provided to teachers for using the strategy across specific content areas. (Please note that these instructional strategies were selected from a long list of possibilities because the staff development committee believed that they could be implemented across subject areas to improve student achievement.) This list of seven instructional strategies represented the focused part of the professional development plan. Following my review of the strategies, I include a discussion of the accountability dimension of the plan.

*Writing to learn.* All areas of content instruction can use this brief strategy (e.g., Andrews, 1997; Prain & Hand, 1996). It is introduced as a prompt, and phrased as a question or sentence starter. The students spend a few minutes formulating a response, then write for 5 or so minutes. The purpose is to engage learners in reflection as they make meaning of new material. Because this is a reflective activity, it is vital that the response be not merely a summary of facts and sequences.

The goals of writing to learn are contingent on where it is introduced during instruction. As a pre-reading activity, it serves to activate prior knowledge. A prompt called "Yesterday's News" invites learners to write a summary of the previous class to a fictitious absent student. Writing to learn during reading may be used to engage the learner in making predictions. The "Crystal Ball" prompt asks students to predict what might happen next in the lesson. Postreading activities are used to extend learners' understanding of the material by having them apply what they have learned to a new situation. For example, students completing a

novel may assume the identity of a character and write a journal entry.

A social studies teacher commented on this instructional strategy.

I used writing to learn as my opening activity almost every day. I gave kids a prompt that was related to their reading assignment from the night before. These prompts were reflective of the readings, not just summaries like "name three causes of World War II." It wasn't long before they knew that they had better do the reading, or talk with a friend about the reading, before my class if they wanted to be successful. I knew that the writing would be good for them, but I didn't realize that they would be much more focused for the rest of my class. After writing, they were into my subject, not still talking about what just happened during the passing period.

*What I know; What I want to learn; What I have learned (K-W-L).* This well-known strategy (Carr & Ogle, 1987; Ogle, 1986) is an excellent opener and summary for a new unit of study. The three-part process is typically arranged as a graphic on chart paper or as an overhead projection. The instructor elicits prior knowledge of a subject by asking, "What do we know about...?" Secondary school teachers often use a variation of this by asking, "What do we think we know about...?" This creates a safety net for otherwise reluctant students to volunteer information they may not feel certain about. The class then moves to the second phase of K-W-L by listing what they want to learn about a topic. These suggestions are phrased as questions and then applied to subsequent lessons. Answering these student-formulated questions is a primary goal of instruction and should be reflected in assessments as well. At the close of the unit, the final step of K-W-L is completed by reviewing and recording student responses to "What have we learned?" When students can see evidence of their inquiry and how it has influenced instruction and assessment, they are able to make meaning of knowledge.

A ninth-grade English teacher was observed beginning a class discussion on *Romeo and Juliet* with the question "What do you know about love?" After a lively discussion about the difference between love and lust that was recorded on chart paper, she asked the students, "What do you

know about love between members of different socioeconomic classes or races?" This question generated significant debate in the class. After approximately 15 minutes, the teacher asked, "Is there anything that you still want to know about this?" The students in the class focused the remaining conversation on why it mattered if people loved each other but were from different classes or races. Before introducing the play, the teacher asked students to write a personal response to this question in their journals. The entire K-W part of the opening for *Romeo and Juliet* took 35 of the 90 minutes of class.

In a 10th-grade science class, the teacher provided each student with an individual K-W-L chart. The first column began "What do you think you know about earthquakes and volcanoes?" The second column contained the question "Is there anything that you think you might need to know about earthquakes or volcanoes?" The next column was headed "Now I know the following about earthquakes and volcanoes," and the final column was titled "How I know this about earthquakes and volcanoes." Students in this science class worked on the first column individually for about 4 minutes. Then they were asked to discuss their responses with a partner. The students worked on the second column for about 4 minutes and again talked about their responses with a partner. Finally the teacher invited students to begin their exploration of tectonic plates by searching the Internet for answers to their questions. As one of the science teachers said, "I thought this might take away from my class time. But the K-W-L has grabbed their interest and helps me stay focused on the students' interest in a given topic."

*Concept mapping.* This graphic organizer (e.g., Lapp, Flood, & Hoffman, 1996; Schwartz & Raphael, 1985) helps learners construct meaning by making connections explicit. Students create concept definition maps using a template that places the concept under study at the center, with radiating arms that discuss its elements. For instance, the concept of *photosynthesis* was introduced in a biology class. Students were each provided with a chart that had a circle in the center and four connection lines drawn from the circle. Inside the circle, students were asked to write the word *photosynthesis*. Students then recorded responses to "What is it?" "Who uses it?" "What

happens if it is not present?" and "How does it affect the food chain?" on each of the four arms extending from the center. Students in this class were invited to use the Internet, the textbook, and a short film as sources for answers to each of these prompts. In addition to the students' written words, the teacher required that students illustrate their concept maps—one picture for each of the four arms. The concept definition map then became an organizer for capturing key points as students refined their maps throughout the unit of study.

Another science teacher discussed his use of concept maps in a group conversation. He used the maps as a review technique at the culmination of a unit. This teacher asked students to write the phrase *states of matter* in the center of their papers. Working in groups of four, the students were expected to identify the states of matter, the characteristics of each state, and illustrate the concept. Most students divided their papers into four sections (solids, liquids, gases, and plasma). Two groups divided their papers into three sections, leaving out plasma. The teacher discussed this with the students and asked them to review their texts to ensure that they had covered all the states of matter identified in the textbook as well as in the readings he had provided.

*Reciprocal teaching.* Many of us have gained a new level of understanding of a topic in the course of explaining it to someone else. This is because some of our most effective learning comes through opportunities to teach or interact with others. Reciprocal teaching (Alfassi, 1998; Palincsar, 1984) allows students to become the instructors of the content they are studying. The four steps of reciprocal teaching are (a) summarizing, (b) questioning, (c) clarifying, and (d) predicting.

This structured inquiry provides learners with a process for exploring text and checking their own comprehension. Students teach each other the meaning they have gained from a text while solidifying their own understanding. In the first phase, *summarizing*, learners read a passage and identify the "big ideas." Unanswered *questions* are then created. In the *clarifying* phase, each reader focuses on unfamiliar vocabulary and puzzling concepts. In the final phase, *predicting*, each student uses all the information available in the reading, including pictures and text structure, to determine

what might happen next. As learners in a classroom become proficient at reciprocal teaching, they begin to guide classroom discussion.

In a 12th-grade social studies class, the teacher routinely divided reading assignments into parts and asked students to use reciprocal teaching to discuss the text in class. This teacher was observed using primary source documents including personal letters and diary entries to engage the students in his lesson on the U.S. Constitution. Students worked in groups of four to each read the selection, then used their understanding of reciprocal teaching to discuss the text. Each group had an identified "team leader" who ensured that the conversation was maintained and extended. At the end of the discussion of each of the selections, another member of the group recorded the group's responses for submission to the teacher. This teacher commented during the focus group session,

Reciprocal teaching teaches students to ask questions; questions that they are interested in. It doesn't matter so much that they might not find that answer right away, or ever, but they've learned how to ask questions. RT also gives my students permission to help each other—which is sometimes hard depending on the cultural and ethnic issues in a class.

*Vocabulary development.* This item was identified as a critical need, given that Tubman students scored lower on vocabulary knowledge than on any other area of the statewide assessment. Vocabulary knowledge was once perceived to be the domain of the English teachers or, even worse, of elementary school teachers. Following a series of discussions, the staff development committee added vocabulary instruction to the list of strategies that should be used in all content areas. Professional development in this area focused on specific skills, including semantic feature analysis, word families, transportable vocabulary knowledge such as prefixes and suffixes, and word charts (Allen, 1999; Lapp, Jacobson, Fisher, & Flood, 1999).

For example, in a music class students were expected to learn about string instruments. The teacher knew that her students did not have the vocabulary knowledge to discuss string instruments, so she used a vocabulary prediction chart. The first column of the chart was a list of words

necessary to discuss string instruments intelligently, including *bow*, *sound hole*, *bridge*, and *bass*. The second column required that students predict what they thought the words meant in terms of music. The third column provided space for students to record the accepted musical definition of the words. The final column required students to identify where they found the accepted definitions.

In a science class, the teacher provided students with a list of words each week using semantic feature analysis to teach the relationships between the words (Pittelman, Heimlich, Berglund, & French, 1991). In addition to these semantic feature analyses, the teacher required that students learn the prefixes and suffixes that they found in their lists.

During the group conversations, an English teacher commented to one of the science teachers,

We used to think that they [the students] knew all the words in the books, but that they were lazy. Now we know that they have a lot of vocabulary to learn and that we better make that part of our teaching. Now I can't imagine asking students to read something at home without previewing the vocabulary. Can you imagine what it must have been like to start reading your homework and not knowing a whole bunch of the words on the page?

**Structured notetaking.** All text is arranged according to structures created by the author. Main ideas are supported by details that further define the topic. In many textbooks, subject headings serve to notify the reader of subtopics. Pictures and graphs also contribute details to the presented concepts. A reader's ability to recognize these structures aids in comprehension and retention. Structured notetaking (Smith & Tompkins, 1988) is a strategy for capturing main ideas and supporting details in content area texts. The teacher provides students with graphic organizers that have been tailored to the text, and students complete the structured notes as they read. As learners become more familiar with common text organizers, they create their own structured notes.

During the discussion groups, teachers consistently reported requiring structured notetaking in their classes. The most common method identified was Cornell notes, with a line drawn down the left side of the paper (e.g., Spires & Stone, 1989). In addition, teachers reported teaching notetaking

skills to their students based on the advancement via individual determination (AVID) model (e.g., Swanson, 1989). Thus, most students at Tubman High School gained experience in recording notes that they could use later for essay writing or reviewing for tests.

One of the student teachers wrote in her journal to her cooperating teacher at the start of the school year, "Why do we have to teach them to take notes, can't they figure it out on their own? It seems like we're babying them with all this." The cooperating teacher shared a journal entry dated 2 months later from the same student teacher that read,

You're right! If we want them to understand the content of our class, we have to make sure that they know how to record information from the textbook, their research, and our lectures. How did I think they would learn this, notetaking is really different in each class and grade!

**Read-alouds.** Reading aloud to students can be the most rewarding part of a teacher's day, yet many teachers, particularly those at the secondary level, incorrectly believe this is too juvenile for their classes. Read-alouds can be an ideal way to put literacy strategies into content area instruction at all levels (Richardson, 2000). The instructor needs to prepare readings in advance and determine what literacy strategy or element will be the focus of the lesson. These might include literary devices like setting and character development, or comprehension strategies like predicting and summarizing.

Across content areas, teachers were observed reading to their students, and some students informed me that they were read aloud to every day in every class. While the math teachers reported the most difficulty in identifying appropriate material for reading, one math teacher was observed reading appropriate newspaper articles to his students while another was observed reading aloud the children's book *Math Curse* (Scieszka, 1995).

In addition to these focused strategies, accountability was integrated with the professional development plan for teachers. As one of the English teachers said, "Our administrators understand these instructional strategies and expect us to use them. When they observe our classrooms, we receive feedback on how well we were able to implement quality instruction, including the use of



these seven strategies." A follow-up conversation with the principal confirmed this. Teacher evaluations centered on the use of the seven instructional strategies identified for schoolwide implementation by the staff development committee. One assistant principal said,

If we're going to spend all this money on professional development, the teachers should be expected to implement what they learn. This has been the problem in the past. We used to provide training on all kinds of different things each year. For the past 2 years, we've gone deep on a few strategies and we're holding the line with implementation. However, we don't just do training anymore. Now we have teachers available for in-class support for [other] teachers who want to learn *how* to implement quality instruction.

### **Component 2: Daily independent reading (with conferences)**

Another component of the schoolwide literacy effort identified by teachers was the creation of "sacred reading time" for all students (e.g., Gordon, 1999). Every day of the school year, students were expected to read for 20 minutes. The teachers in the discussion group did not like the way that Sustained Silent Reading was implemented at a nearby school—20 minutes of each English class was devoted to independent reading. They thought it was very important that everyone stop for 20 minutes and read at the same time. At Tubman, the class period after lunch was extended by 20 minutes. The teachers at Tubman also believed that there should be some accountability for the reading time, and they created a handbook for teachers about conferences. Thus every teacher was responsible for independent reading, and every teacher needed reading materials in his or her classroom.

The implementation of this component of the schoolwide effort was one of the more costly interventions. During the first year, the library received a grant for US\$50,000 to purchase books that teachers could rotate through their classrooms. In addition to this rotating book collection, teachers were given a US\$500 budget to purchase books. During the second year, each teacher was provided

with an additional US\$800 to purchase classroom books. While many students regularly bring their own reading material to class, some students liked to read books from the teacher's shelf. As one of the Exercise and Nutritional Sciences (formerly Physical Education) teachers said,

Imagine that, I have a whole bookshelf of books for students to read in the gym! Students sit around on the mats, the floor, the bleachers, or the field and read for the first 20 minutes of my 4th block class—it puts them in a whole different mood for exercise!

One of the ninth-grade English teachers commented,

I've been here at Tubman for 12 years. I've never seen so much reading. Teachers are reading, students are reading, and administrators are reading. I've also never heard so much talk about reading. I have over 600 young adult books in my classroom. You should hear all the talk about these books. Students are always making recommendations to their classmates about books they like. It's amazing and wonderful!

Walking across campus one day during independent reading time, I was stopped by a student on her way to the nurse. She seemed to want to make sure that I did not get into trouble when I went into a classroom, for she said, "You better get yourself a book if you're going in that room. She's serious, you gotta read every day."

As an element of independent reading time, teachers meet with individual students about their books. While the teachers know that modeling reading is important, and they do so a couple of days per week, they know that accountable talk about books is also important. A science teacher was observed asking a student about her book. The first question was "What just happened in your book?" After the student provided a brief retelling, the science teacher asked, "Could that really happen?" The short discussion was followed by a prediction question, "What do you think will happen next?" This entire discussion lasted approximately 4 minutes. The teacher recorded notes on a large index card and then called the next student for a conference. In a ninth-grade English class, the teacher asked a student several questions that required him to make connections between two

## **Data collection and analysis**

### *Participants*

A total of 95 teachers were employed at Tubman High School during the time of the study. An invitation to participate in focus group discussions was sent to teachers who (a) had been employed at Tubman for at least 3 years, (b) were not planning to retire or transfer during the summer of the study, and (c) were current classroom teachers and had not been released from their teaching responsibilities for administrative duties. All 63 of the teachers who met these criteria were invited to participate in focus group discussions during their prep period. A total of 54 (86%) accepted the invitation and participated. In addition, 10 of these teachers were randomly selected for classroom observations. All 10 agreed to being observed at random times.

### *Instruments and procedures*

The focus groups were scheduled during nine different prep period times over 2 months. The discussions lasted for 60 to 90 minutes. The general questions I asked included the following:

- Why did reading achievement improve at the school?
- To what do you attribute these changes?
- Are these changes replicable by other urban high schools?
- What plans are in place to continue this positive development?

Follow-up and clarifying questions were used to ensure that points were clear and that I understood the implications.

Classroom observations were scheduled throughout the spring semester. Each of the 10 teachers was observed three times. Observations lasted for 20 to 45 minutes. Field notes were used to capture the instructional strategies used by teachers. A total of 120 pages of field-note data were collected.

*(continued)*

texts—one that he was reading now and one that he had previously read by the same author. The English teacher also asked the student to read aloud, quietly, to her. She listened to the student read for a paragraph, noting errors that the student

made on a log form that resembled the running record used in some elementary schools.

## **Component 3: Block scheduling**

The final component of the schoolwide focus on literacy identified by the teachers was block scheduling (Benton-Kupper, 1999). This school schedule requires students to attend four classes per day for 90 minutes each. Traditional year-long classes are completed in one term (semester). Thus a student may take math in the fall and science in the spring. English for ninth- and 10th-grade students was extended for an entire year, 90 minutes per day, which is twice the instructional minutes that other students in the district receive. While not supported by all the teachers, the vast majority of teachers who participated in the discussion groups discussed the use of time at Tubman positively. As a science teacher said,

The block schedule allows me to open my class with a read-aloud, introduce material, discuss the textbook or other reading assignments, and still complete a lab. This focus really helps students understand science content. I think that they also are reading more of the textbook because of it.

An 11th-grade English teacher commented that the students she now has are much better prepared. She added, "Students know that we care about their literacy. We don't take excuses, we provide the help they need and we expect great things from them." A ninth-grade English teacher commented on her class,

The double session of English has really allowed us the time we need to focus on literacy knowledge of our students. Every day I can read to my students, discuss literature with them, make connections between the literature and their other classes, work with vocabulary, conduct writing workshops, and really get to know them well. With our schedule and the class size reduction effort in ninth grade, this year I'll get to know a total of 60 students—for the whole year. Two years ago I had 172 students a day! This is really making the difference!

In addition to allowing for more time with fewer students, the block schedule was credited with giving teachers access to additional professional de-

velopment. The first Thursday of each month became known as "prep-period training." Each teacher in the school attended a 90-minute training session during his or her prep period. This allowed the staff development committee an opportunity to plan nine sessions per year that everyone would attend, in addition to the after-school professional development programs that are available. "I used to miss most of the literacy trainings because I coach volleyball after school," said one teacher during a discussion group. "Now I get to do both, so I don't have to be confronted with the question of which is more important to me."

### What changes are in place for next year?

When I asked about the additional initiatives needed to continue this upward trend of student achievement, the teachers at Tubman identified two. The first was writing across the curriculum. While they supported the "writing to learn" initiative that was used to begin classes or predict text, teachers identified a need to focus on the assessment of student writing. The staff development committee has been charged with creating a writing rubric that can be used by all the teachers at the school for writing assignments. One science teacher said,

I wasn't trained to teach and evaluate student writing. I know it's important, but I need to know what the English teachers want me to look for. If we all use the same format to give students feedback about their writing, the consistency will have a positive impact.

In addition to this writing focus, teachers at Tubman wanted extra after-school activities focused on literacy. The school received one of the 21st Century Community Learning Center grants from the U.S. Department of Education as well as funds from the school district to operate after-school programs. However, some teachers at Tubman were concerned that the after-school initiative was not academic enough. While there was a homework club and a tutoring center, clear recommendations about literacy-related classes offered after school were common. As a social studies teacher noted,

### **Data collection and analysis (continued)**

#### *Data analysis*

Data analysis was recursive throughout the collection process. Focus group discussion notes were coded and organized into themes following each session. At the completion of the collection phase, I reviewed all the data for appropriate placement in each theme. The four themes emerged easily. Teachers were consistent in their use of terminology, which aided in coding. The classroom observation field notes were used to validate the discussion groups. Teachers indicated that they were using the instructional strategies, accessing the peer coach, and implementing independent reading activities. All of these actions were observed in classroom practice.

In addition to increasing the validity of the study through discussion groups and observations, a member check process was used. I invited two of the teachers who participated in the discussion groups to a follow-up session. Each of them was well known to the faculty, and each had more than 10 years' teaching experience at Tubman. In preparation for the follow-up session, these two teachers were given a draft of the findings in this article. The three of us discussed the findings and their implications. While the teachers recommended no significant changes, they focused a significant amount of our conversation on future implications and the need to "stay the course," given that people at the school finally had experienced success.

I teach the after-school DJ and karaoke class. I could do a lot more with literacy, like require students to write essays about the songs they want to sing or write about the components of the system they'd like to use as a DJ. I could also use some of the vocabulary strategies I learned and ask kids to learn the meanings for the words in the songs they are singing. I've never really thought about my after-school class helping in our literacy program. I think that many of the after-school teachers could infuse literacy into our classes. We just need to make that a priority like we did [in] our regular day classes.



## Professional development is the key

There is no simple answer to the original question: "Why did reading achievement change this year?" Teachers at Tubman suggested that there are at least three reasons for this upward trend.

Questions remain: Were they all necessary? Would one have been sufficient? Unfortunately, we may never know the answer to these questions given the complexity of our work in urban schools.

Having said that, it is important to note that the reading achievement of these urban high school youths was influenced by quality instruction and support for classroom teachers. The implications from this study and others (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 1999; Joyce & Showers, 1995) suggest that the professional development of teachers is critically linked to student achievement. The staff development committee at Tubman decided to "go deep" on seven specific instructional strategies and continue professional development for all teachers on these seven strategies until everyone could use them effectively in the classroom.

In addition, the staff development committee used monthly prep-period meetings as a vehicle to provide professional development rather than the more traditional after-school approach to training. Secondary school teachers are busy with after-school and extracurricular activities, the sheer numbers of students they see daily, graduation requirements and exit exams, and the realities of the adolescent years. The use of the monthly prep-period meetings provided all teachers with an opportunity to attend professional development activities and to participate in conversations with their peers about the implementation of the instructional strategies.

The findings from this study also indicated that school structures influence student achievement. The additional 20 minutes of schoolwide reading and the block schedule certainly played a role in the increase in reading scores. Providing students with sustained time for reading, communicating the importance of literacy, and asking students to master fewer disciplines at a time are important considerations in a schoolwide literacy effort.

It seems that the use of a focused literacy plan also plays a role in student achievement. Over the 2 years of implementation, students experienced countless read-alouds, took notes across their

classes in a similar fashion, learned to display their knowledge in concept maps, and were taught to ask lots of questions. The student government president said,

We are learning what to expect from the teachers at Tubman. For example, almost every teacher reads to us, which is kind of cool. We also know what to expect, like notes and homework, you know because they all do it the same way. It's like we don't have to worry about how they want something done, we just need to worry about what they want us to learn.

One question remains. Is the experience at Tubman replicable by other urban high schools? The discussion with the teachers from this school was not sustained—their answer was simply yes. There was agreement in each focus group that any school could do this. As the art teacher said,

If we can do it, anyone can. It's about focus and persistence. It wasn't about these seven strategies specifically. We picked those, but there could have been others. The point is, our staff development committee didn't keep changing the program every meeting, and we all got very good because of it.

The experience at Tubman seems to suggest that, for student achievement in urban schools to significantly increase, both school structures and sustained professional development are necessary. In the words of the principal, "Our students don't just need good teachers, they need great teachers who are provided with the right resources to be successful. To improve, we have to support the teachers."

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